

New Orleans Comission of Safety to Andrew Jackson, September 18, 1814, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

COMMITTEE OF SAFETY TO JACKSON.

New Orleans, September 18, 1814.

Major Genral. A. Jackson

Sir, At a meeting of the Citizens of New Orleans and its vicinity held on the 14th Instant the subscribers were appointed a Committee to cooperate with the constituted Civil and Military authorities in the Defence of this place against the open attacks, or secret Machinations of the Enemy.

The performance of the duty assigned us naturally leads to a communication with the Commander in Chief of this District which we make by means of the Governor of the state who has expressed his approbation of our measures, and does us the honor to forward this letter. Altho in our resolutions and addresses, Policy and Duty have induced us to assume a tone of confidence necessary to animate the people and impose on the Enemy, from you sir we ought not to conceal, that the only hope of preserving this place in case of a serious attack lies in an efficient force to be furnished by you.

This Country is strong by Nature, but extremely weak from the nature of its population, from the La Fourche downwards on both sides the River, that population consists (with inconsiderable exceptions) of Sugar Planters on whose large Estates there are on an average 25 slave to one White Inhabitant the maintenance of domestic tranquility in this part of the state obviously forbids a call on any of the White Inhabitants to the defense of the frontier, and even requires a strong additional force, attempts have already it is said

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been detected, to excite insurrection, and the character of our Enemy leaves us no doubt that this flagitious mode of warfare will be resorted to, at any rate the evil is so great that no precautions against it can be deem'd superfluous. We have some strength of militia in the City but it is badly armed, and the same considerations forbid the removal of it from the immediate vicinity of the town. Under these circumstances we look to the forces under your command alltogether for external defence and in a great measure for Domestic tranquility, that part of it which consists of the drafted Militia from the upper part of the state will suffice when organized for the latter object, but it will be some weeks before that organization can be effected and in the mean time we fear that the first appearance of attack would expose us to considerable danger, the mix'd population particularly of the City presents a source too from which we anticipate much evil, tho we cannot yet form any accurate idea of its extent. But tho' we consider our present force as inadequate to the defence of the Country its natural strength would render it impregnable if protected by a comparatively small force. In reviewing the several points of probable attack, we say nothing of that by way of Mobile and the lake Ponchartraine, or the more circuitous one of Baton Rouge this is under your immediate inspection and therefore gives us no uneasiness, 6 of the others we beg leave to take a rapid view which may possibly present some ideas that may have escaped your attention.

The first of these is the ascent of the River by the Balize; it presents many inconveniences to our Enemy and will not be attempted unless we are left entirely destitute of force. Two Thousand Men stationed between the City and the English Turn would be sufficient with heavy artillery on travelling Carriages, to prevent his approach by this route, especially if assisted by a few Gun Boats, and exposed to the danger of fire ships which the Current would carry among the fleet. We mention a position between the City and the English turn for this reason, that the same body would be ready to meet the Second and as we think a more probable point of attack by a landing at the *Chef Monteur* 1 this point projects into Lake Borne, 2 is accessible to shipping and is connected by an high ridge with the City from which it is distant only five leagues, this place is at present wholly unfortified,

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tho' it is susceptible of being so at a small expence, and the ridge of communication between it and the City, is narrow and may be obstructed by Abbatis—so as to render the approach extremely difficult if not impracticable in the face of a very inferior force—there is also an approach by the Riviere Aux Chiens and the Bayou Terre Aux Boeuf³ these would be effectually guarded by a Fort at a place called La Fourche de Lisle. The Lake Ponchartraine and the Bayou St John's⁴ is the only remaining point on this side, the fort at the Petit Coquille, the Gun Boats if they resume their station and the same body of Men spoken of above join'd to the Governor and Militia of the town, would be sufficient on this side as the passage of the Bayou may in a few hours be rendered impassible by water; and the swamps render the approach by land little to be dreaded. On the West side of the River the first approach as we descend from the sea is by the Bayou La Fourche, this is navigable for armed boats up to the place where it forks from the Mississippi,⁵ it has little or no current, and the navigation is not difficult but it is narrow and may be easily obstructed, the banks are thickly inhabited by about Five Hundred Men even to the Gun, if they were inspired with a proper spirit, little need be apprehended from that quarter, but to guard against accidents One Thousand Men should be stationed about Mid Distance between the forks and the City, ready to march to the nearest point of the Bayou which there runs nearly parallel with the River, or to descend and cover the City should an attack be made by the last Route to which the Committee will call your attention, which is by Baritaria—here is a port occupied until lately by a number of Buccaneers under the Carthaginian flag,⁶ it is accessible only to vessels drawing about 10 feet water and is capable of being strongly defended against any attack either from the sea or the Bayou and lakes by which it is surrounded, this port should be secured by a Battery and two

1 Chef Menteur. See p. 123, n. 2, *post*.

2 Borgne.

3 The Rivière aux Chênes and the Bayou Terre aux Boeufs lay southeastward from the English Turn.

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4 Northward from the city.

5 Far above New Orleans (Donaldsonville).

6 The Lafittes, at their establishment at Barataria, flew the flag of the Independent Government of Cartagena de las Indias.

or three Gun Boats. it communicates with the River by a series of Lakes and Bayous bordered by trembling prairies, not more than 3½ to 4 feet water can be carried up to the heads of the bayous whence canals are cut communicating with the banks of the River opposite the town—this approach is naturally very difficult, and may at a small expence be rendered impracticable—a post with a few pieces of Cannon established at a place called the Temple and a blockhouse or two at the forks below would secure us on this side against a much superior force. The Grand Magazine for Powder together with the barracks on the opposite side of the River are in the present state of things at the mercy of the Enemy should they make a *Coup de Main* this way, as they are guarded only by a small detachment of regular troops and by a Company of Militia relieved every day from the City. here about One Thousand Troops ought to be stationed, and this would complete the plan of defence which we take the liberty to propose against external attack which you will observe exclusive of the Garrisons of Plaquemin, Fort Charles and about Five Hundred Men for the City, form a total of only Four Thousand Men which in our opinion would completely secure this place from any, but such an overwhelming force as will not probably be brought against it, and which at any rate, cannot be brought before we can receive efficient aid from above. A Corps of One Hundred Cavalry divided on the two banks of the River would effectually repress insurrection, and if practicable we pray may be sent to us. A Battery was erected at the Balize⁷ and by order of General Flournoy abandoned, the reestablishment of this post, with a small guard would we think be of essential service in protecting vessels that are fortunate enough to enter the River against the Armed boats of the Enemy, and would serve as an advanced post to the Port [Fort?] of

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Plaquemin, a Block ship anchored off the same place would also be extremely useful and the Ship Louisiana tho' old and unfit for sea would answer this purpose.

7 At the mouth of the river, some 30 miles below Fort St. Philip (Plaquemines).

We have thus far performed a part of the duty assigned us, by communicating freely to you our ideas on a subject so interesting to us, to our fellow Citizens, and to our Country at large that we are sure we need make no apology for the liberty we take. Should you concur with us in opinion that the force required would put us in safety against any attack, and if you have the means of ordering the required number of men to our aid, we cannot but believe that steps will immediately be taken to comply with our request. No point of the whole union is so important to so large a portion of it as this City is to the Western states and the expence of defending it bears no kind of comparison to the inconveniences and distress, to say nothing of the dishonor attending its loss.

We have but one other request Sir, with which we shall close our communication. It is that if your operations will permit, you will honor our City with a visit, tho' short it would have an happy effect, the good people of this state would be encouraged by your presence, the emissaries of the Enemy, and the partizans of foreign powers would dread the scrutiny of your intelligence, and the reputation which your talents have so justly acquired would inspire all with that confidence which we individually feel. With sentiments of respect

We remain etc.

P. Foucher

Destrehan

Edw Livingston

Aug. Macarty

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Benj. Morgan

G.M. Ogden

D. Bouligny

Dusuaud De La Croix 8

8 These were among the leading citizens of New Orleans. Dominique Bouligny was afterward U. S. senator from Louisiana 1824–1829; J. N. Destrèhan was elected senator in 1811; François Dusuau de Lacroix was founder and first president of the Bank of Louisiana; Edward Livingston, of New York, brother of R. R. Livingston, had resided in New Orleans since 1804, and was afterward Secretary of State.